



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

HANDICAPS IN LATER YEARS FROM CHILD LABOR

BY WILLIAM E. HARMON,
New York.

So much has been written upon the effect in later days, of child labor under unhealthy conditions, that the case of the child against his present environment of the workshop or mine is fairly demonstrated in his favor.

In defending present conditions of employment other arguments are used—those of expediency; the necessity of assisting in the support of the family; the unequal competition through unequal laws in different states; the correlation between the employment of children, and the employment of men and women in keeping the factory, mill or mine in operation.

Investigations with which we are familiar are naturally the study of extreme types, excessive hours, unsanitary surroundings, bad light and poor food; and the mass of testimony gathered embraces that class of workers with which we have but little intimate relationship or personal concern—the child of the mine, the cotton mill and the glass factory.

Could it be shown that child labor has and is influencing our own American civilization, has perhaps already placed its stamp upon our own careers and will on those of our children, the situation would assume a different aspect. The disorder will have entered our own households.

My purpose is to take up the influence of child labor, upon the best of our people; to trace out the agencies which have affected the ultimate accomplishments of men and women of fine, natural faculties; to show that in a greater or less degree we, ourselves, may be suffering the blight of the heavy burdens of our clean-blooded ancestors who hewed wood and drew water, and made this country what it is. With them it was a condition which came out of the necessities of a primitive life in a new country. With us it is no longer either necessary or right. It may be possible to trace an invariable connection between child labor and manhood mediocrity. The current phrase "that any American boy may become Presi-

dent" may not only be untrue, but the truth may be that very few boys who gain a living by laborious effort can possibly afterwards fit themselves for this or any other position requiring serious mental work. I am inclined to think we will see that the instances where a man has arisen above seemingly extreme handicaps in youth, prove rather than disprove the proposition that excessive labor in childhood, not only interferes with the normal development of the man, but actually prevents it.

Of those who may be classed as representing the true American type, the largest number are engaged in agricultural pursuits. There are six million farmers, of one sort or another, in the United States—of these, four million labor with their own hands, and use their children to a greater or less degree in the various activities of the farm. As a whole, these people come from good stock, and are of average intelligence. The farm affords normal, if not the best soil, in which to produce representative men and women. The child of the farm is not handicapped by the manifold disintegrating influences surrounding the city child, nor the child of immoral or destitute parents. In fact, the farm of itself gives the child a fair chance—it is a culture bed in which the body and brain grow toward, rather than away from the normal. Therefore, the study of the effect of child labor on the farm will give us an accurate idea of the actual results of the child labor itself, removed from the complications arising from an environment, which is of itself baneful.

Effect of Physical Strain

There is little available statistical material showing the effect of excessive child labor under healthful conditions. The consideration of this aspect of the subject has been incidental to investigations of children under bad surroundings. It has been largely the bi-product of work on the more imminent problems requiring immediate action. The most one can do is to give the results of experience and personal observation, and a fragmentary outline of the experience of others. My purpose is to call attention to a fact which I believe to exist, rather than to prove it; to encourage a study of the matter by those interested in children and their betterment; to lay out lines for future work; to give a basis of probability; and to justify ultimately a comprehensive survey of the situation.

My own consideration of the problem, which has extended over a number of years and in various parts of the country, has convinced me that excessive toil under the most healthful conditions between the ages of twelve and sixteen, or that any toil during this period which precludes an equivalent development of the intellect, results in an arrest of the normal growth of the brain; a replacement of functional with connective tissue or neuroglia. It reduces permanently the mental capacity of the individual, reflecting itself subsequently by the loss of ambition, of will power, the power of concentration, of extended mental effort.

An investigation made to determine the correctness of this hypothesis may proceed along three lines:

1. In the study of families of children where exactly the same conditions of living exist, but in which certain of the children have the opportunity for mental development, while the others are deprived of it through work. A study of this type of case, if sufficiently extended, would prove beyond dispute the truth of the proposition herein presented—if it be true.

2. A study of the children sent from institutions for adoption. If the intellectual achievements of the children of adoption, in a large percentage of cases, were greatly beyond those of the remainder of the family, the evidence would tend strongly to the validity of the proposition. The advantage here is, that the material is easily accessible, although the results are not so conclusive.

3. The third line of investigation would be to make a comparative study between the relative accomplishments of parents and children. It is reasonable to assume that the natural capacity of the child and his parents is about equal, and if the inability of the parent, through toil in childhood, to secure an education, has resulted in a serious handicap in later years, when compared with his children, to whom, by self-sacrifice, he has given proper opportunities, it is at least presumable that the labor itself has had to do with the case.

Early Employment vs. Opportunity for Mental Development

For many years I have been interested in this question, particularly in many country districts of the United States. I have seen instances where whole families, except perhaps one member, were raised under conditions involving severe physical

labor during youth, and I have noted in the subsequent history of the family, the fortunate child pursuing an even and continuous career of advancement, while his brothers, not only were left behind, but went on through life unstimulated by ambition for betterment. I have seen fellow playmates at twelve years of age equally bright, part intellectually, never to meet again, by reason of one being committed to a few years of hard labor, while the other pursued his onward course, growing intellectually as he grew physically.

I have watched the individual working child at eight, ten and twelve years, bright eyes, face full of latent intelligence; at fourteen his eyes begin to deaden, his face becomes heavy; at sixteen much of the light of intelligence has passed out, and he gazes on the world in the quiet open-eyed manner of the mentally deficient—his ambition gone, his powers of rejuvenation vanished.

I have accumulated some data bearing on the subject, where the illustrations of my hypothesis seem indisputable. The following are a few of the conspicuous instances wherein the facts seem plain:

A. Tennessee farmer, moved in 1870 to Texas, with twelve children—extremely poor. The whole family, except one, worked on the farm and in the neighborhood. One went to live with an uncle who was station master, assisted in the work, learned telegraphy, studied law, moved to New York, is one of the leading lawyers in the city. All of his brothers, except one, whom he himself educated, are small farmers or laboring men.

B. Young woman, born in Ohio, member of a family of several children, all of whom earned a living by extreme labor. She went to live with a relative, who was postmaster in a fourth class post office; studied with the local minister in odd hours; afterward took a course in a business college; worked at stenography; became interested in medicine; is now editor and large owner in one of the most important monthly publications in the country.

C. Kentuckian, born 1850, five brothers, all worked on the farm. He was sent to school, working in the Summer months; studied engineering; is now president of an important New York National bank. The rest of the family have remained on the farm—are all men of limited intelligence, and have accomplished nothing of consequence.

D. Virginia boy; overworked as a child in making railroad ties; was exceedingly bright at ten and twelve. Is now twenty years of age and very energetic; ambitious to do, but lacks power of concentration; becomes easily confused, and is earning the wages of a farm laborer. The remaining children of his family have had some advantages, and are all progressing intellectually in a normal manner.

E. Four brothers, born in Ohio between '40 and '50; two worked on the farm, and one in the shop of their father, cabinet making. The fourth took a job in a printing office; learned to read; set type; subsequently became proof reader; then editor; passed a competitive examination for commission in the United States Regular Army, and entered upon a career of much distinction. One brother a carpenter; one dead; one a harness maker.

F. Four boys on an Ohio farm; oldest brother worked extremely hard during youth to support the family, and subsequently sent the younger children to school. All of these children have succeeded well in business. The older brother has paid the penalty by an intelligence so greatly inferior to his brothers that it would be hard to distinguish them as of the same family.

All but one of these examples are children of farmers or families where the natural environment was good. These are given in illustration of the lines of investigations first indicated; where children of the same family, through relatively different opportunities, have worked out totally different careers.

The Changes in Environment

With regard to the second type of cases, those children removed from a limited to a broader environment—by adoption,—I have for some time been interested in providing homes of adoption for the children of indigent parents. These children naturally secure many advantages in their new homes, and it has been easy to follow their careers, and even to learn something of their brothers and sisters. A relative of mine has been engaged in the investigation of children of this type, who have been already placed in homes.

The general opinion of those with whom I have consulted, such men as Homer Folks and Charles Loring Brace, and my own observations lead me to believe that the career of the child of adoption is much the same as that of the other children of the family into

which he or she is adopted, and in many instances is marked with great success, while the other children, who remain with their parents because they are sufficiently advanced in years to help support the family, have been little better than their indigent parents.

Relative Achievement of Parents and Children

The third class of cases which I have investigated, and regarding which I advise study, involve the relative achievements of parent and child. It is here the question becomes an intimate one, touching our own lives. We are surrounded by living illustrations of the injury of child labor in our own ancestry, either direct or collateral.

The winning of the West was a heroic achievement, and yet, it had its price in the limitation of intellectual development in most of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. I am not contending that there were no compensatory advantages in the development of the physical qualities of courage and endurance to which we owe greatly our present day success. I merely assert that, with the generation itself, there were limitations imposed which absolutely precluded the men of the time from such acquirements as to-day are open to those without the intellectual handicap. Ulysses S. Grant became President of the United States, but Jesse Grant, the tanner and contemporary of my own grandfather, could neither have occupied that exalted position nor any other of great importance.

The life of Abraham Lincoln is an exemplification of the possibility of achievement under extreme conditions, but in Abraham Lincoln we find an individual of great physical strength, on whose vitality ordinary tasks made no impression, and who, through the influence of a neighbor, absorbed early a love of books and learning. Had Abraham Lincoln's labor been measured by his strength until he reached his sixteenth year, it is quite possible that the world would never have been enriched by the life contribution of the Great Emancipator. The present generation is one with which we have to deal and the present day requirements are not those of the pioneer. The problems we meet are those requiring intellectual equipment. Those of the early part of the nineteenth century required largely physical strength.

I am familiar with the South where the ante-bellum farming

aristocracy and the lower whites are equally poor. We see in our cities the "unsubmerged tenth"; those who, by the sacrifice of family, or extraordinary virility and ambition, have been enabled to gain a start; but you can travel among the plantations of Virginia, North and South Carolina and find hundreds of families of the best type and heredity where poverty has been so extreme as to require the constant toil of the children; and wherever you find it, almost invariably the marks of mental arrest are distinctly evident. I have traveled through the mountain districts of Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia, where the stock is pure American for generations back, but where child labor is almost universal, and where the educational impulse has scarcely touched the people. Here the sign of organic degeneracy is well-nigh universal.

To all of us the investigation of this class of cases is an easy one, and if we will but give the matter serious thought, I am convinced that the evil of child labor itself, removed from any other correlative influences, will be apparent. We have but to look about us to trace the history of families in our own community; in fact, to study ourselves, in many instances, to find wherein the excessive work of our fathers and forefathers has handicapped us in the exercise of the finer intellectual and artistic faculties which we feel sure are potentially resident within us. This brings the problem into our own households—this makes the evil cry with a near voice and imposes a task on us on behalf of our own posterity.

Mental Retardation

In the great and permanent work to which the National Child Labor Committee is devoting itself, nothing could be more fruitful of good results than a thorough investigation into the definite though subtle influences of work itself on the development of the growing boy or girl. I am personally convinced that with excessive toil there is an actual organic change which takes place in the brain before the age of sixteen; a cessation of the growth of the functional or gray-cell tissue—a lessening in the depth of the convolutions, or possibly, a replacement of functional by connective tissue, which, for all time, puts a check upon the mental capacity of the individual. It does not merely make success more difficult—it makes certain kinds of success impossible. The loss

of an arm, a leg or an eye handicaps the individual—it makes it more difficult for him to accomplish his ends, but it does not make it impossible. The loss of hearing or of sight absolutely closes the door to work in certain directions. So it is with any structural change in the brain which diminishes its capacity. The world would stand aghast if a considerable percentage of our healthy children were deprived of eyesight or of hearing, but the same condition is being permitted to take place wherever children are forced, even under healthy conditions, to toil during the period of adolescence to a degree which deprives them of either the time or the strength to cultivate their power to think.

Such an investigation would be within the proper functions of the National Child Labor Committee. It would involve a broad study of individual cases; it would ramify into all the conditions of living. Where children under exactly similar conditions of heredity are placed in different environments, are many in number, but somewhat difficult to find. The study of children of adoption is easy, but not altogether satisfactory. The investigation of the relationship between parent and child, through history and in society, would reveal a multitude of cases, but obviously the evidence therein gathered would be accumulative rather than positive; but I am sure enough data could be collected to clearly prove the proposition that child labor itself is productive of degeneracy of the mental fibre. The evidence would also impress and make more emphatic the greater evils of child labor under adverse conditions of health in the work shops, cotton mills and mines, and would bring home to us the grave responsibility of permitting any of the youth of the land to be deprived of the privilege of equipping themselves for a fair chance in the struggle for success. It would show that this country is not free to all its subjects—that many are actually condemned in childhood to a form of slavery, for which the community itself is largely responsible. It would fortify the longings of those now making sacrifices to give their children an education; it would place a restraining hand upon those who, perhaps through their own earlier limitations, are indifferent to the conditions surrounding their offspring. It would strengthen us in our effort to enlarge the opportunities of the young, for it would be irrefutable proof that not only is child labor bad under unsanitary surroundings, but that all excessive labor

among children, or even all labor which does not give full opportunity for simultaneous development, is criminally wrong.

On account of the important program to which our National organization is committed, this aspect of the case has not been seriously regarded, but it may be the gravest of them all, and I trust that others will determine to consider the question—to study it in their own lives and the lives of those about them. I think there are very few of us who, through our individual experience, cannot find evidence enough to show the hypothesis herein stated provable, if not proven.

If it can be clearly demonstrated that continuous labor of any kind, imposed upon a boy or girl, introduces an element of danger to his well-being, the public conscience can be relied upon to ultimately work out a solution of the problem.